

In the history of redemption we see that Zechariah's conception of the Lord was that he was sovereign over all the nations (9:1-8 10:11-11:3) but that he had chosen Israel as his own people (8:1-3). He had used the nations to punish her for her sins (7:14), but because of his jealousy for Zion (1:14; 8:1-2) had already begun the process of rebuilding the people from the lands to which they had been taken and would some day complete a regathering process. (8:4-8)

Unlike the earlier prophets, Zechariah did not see the return from exile as the beginning of the new Davidic dynasty. That final step of restoration would come only in a future day when the Lord would return to dwell in Jerusalem and bless his people richly once again (8:1-23). A new type of leadership would lead the country (6:12-13) and a fountain of cleansing from sin and impurity would be opened, removing the temptation of idolatry and therefore the need for prophecy (13:1-6). Zechariah maintains the ethical concerns of the prophets (5:3-4; 7:8-10; 8:16). He also complements Haggai's exclusivity with a note of universalism (2:11; 8:20-23).

The high point of Zechariah, however, is messianic prophecy. The Messiah will be a consecrated, ruling high priest, typified in 3:1-5. This future king will come to Jerusalem (9:9-17) and, according to the New Testament interpretation, is also the stricken shepherd (13:7-9). This is the richest area of Zechariah and repays careful study and reflection.

Questions bearing on the study of Zechariah include these: Is Matthew 27:9 a reference to Zechariah 11:12-13? If it is, why was it attributed to Jeremiah? Does Zechariah contain apocalyptic material? Is there as sharp a dividing line between apocalyptic and prophetic material as is commonly claimed? How does this affect 1) the date of Zechariah 9-14 and 2) our interpretation of Zechariah?

Archaeology and Zechariah

Due to the nature of the material in Zechariah there is little archaeological evidence with any direct relevance to the book. The post-exilic and intertestamental ages in general have yielded little archaeological material in Palestine. The Jews who returned to Jerusalem were able to because of the policies of Cyrus the Great of Persia. He allowed and encouraged the return of any peoples (not just the Jews) who had been deported by Assyria and Babylonia. He also claimed in an inscription found in Babylon that he rebuilt their sanctuaries and returned the images of the gods which had been taken away. The Jews had no image, of course, so he returned to them the utensils and furniture of the Temple--the closest he could come to returning their "god". Ezra 1:2-4 and 6:3-5 preserve his decree concerning the Jews and Jerusalem.

Zechariah and Haggai reflect the political situation in the Persian Empire. Haggai, beginning to prophesy two months before Zechariah, reflected the rebellions throughout the empire. By Zechariah's time of writing it had become clear that Persian control was there to stay for a while longer and any kingdom hopes for Judah would have to be yet future. Judah became one of several territories in the fifth satrapy (administrative district) of the Persian Empire. The satrap had various governors serving under him, the best known of whom was Nehemiah, governor of Judah. Thus although archaeology does not relate directly to Zechariah's writings, by understanding the historical background we can better understand his audience and the times in which they lived.